

Another Dash into the Record Books (wind: -2.1 m/s)

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When I first performed some of the analysis herein, I thought: “Wow! Bailey gets another title!”. Unfortunately, that was before August 3rd, and the 100m final in Athens. Now, Donovan Bailey doesn’t hold the World sprint crown. It’s slipped and fallen south of the border (your border, that is!). Maurice Greene, a relative unknown with a PB of 10.43s three years ago, reigned victorious at 9.86s, matching the third best legal clocking ever. But, the events of that day didn’t change the overall result of my work. By virtue of the race in question, some would say that Bailey is no longer the “World’s Fastest Man”. But has he lost his place in the record books altogether? Currently, the 9.84s from Atlanta is still holding strong. Can’t we say more about our current international sprint sensation?

The truth is: not only can we say more about Bailey (who still seems to have the knack of saying too much about his competition!), but we can say something great about the “Blast off! guy” himself (to quote Bogdan Poprawski), Robert Esmie, perhaps our sprint celebrity for Sydney in 2000?

Following the National Championships in Abbotsford, the media jumped all over Bailey’s winning performance. The World Record holder had run a mediocre, sub-par 10.03s, well off his 9.84 WR performance of 1996. Even a medal hope looked grim for the defending champion, who was himself displeased with his race, moaning and groaning of leg injuries and viruses. In defense of his prodigy, Texas-based coach Dan Pfaff was quick to lash back at the media, highlighting the underplayed fact that Bailey’s run was into a head-wind, and a strong one at that: -2.1 m/s! He denounced the ongoing criticism of the time, and ventured to guess that it would probably correspond to about 9.90s under ideal conditions.

Taking a note from Pfaff, I quickly crunched this data in my wind-correction formula, which was presented in the July 1997 issue of Athletics [1]. 10.03s (how mediocre!), and -2.1 m/s... Suffice it to say, Dan Pfaff was wrong. Bailey hadn’t run a 9.90, nor had he even clocked anything in the 9.9 range. In fact, Bailey had cruised to a 9.89s still-air equivalent! At the time, this ranked him as the world leader on my wind-correction tables, numerically matching the *legal* world leader, Ato Boldon’s early season 9.89s

from Modesto, CA (run with a +0.8 m/s tailwind, a 9.94s still-air sprint; see Table 5).

Yet another home-town boy does good!

If Bailey's head-wind charge of 10.03s was actually a blistering 9.89s, what then became of the other times? Table 2 tells all: Robert Esmie (unofficially) joined the elite club of sub-10s sprinters, with his 10.10s in Abbotsford translating to a 9.96s still-air dash. Bruny Surin was knocking at the door of the club with a 10.01s equivalent, but couldn't quite get in this year. Not only was Esmie's silver medal performance good enough to put him unofficially under 10s, it also ranks him (as of the World Championships) sixth best in the world, behind Tim Montgomery, Frank Fredericks, Boldon, Bailey, and Greene (see Table 3)!

What's interesting about that top 6 group of athletes? Several things. Two are from Canada, and two are from the US – Canada ties the US for number of top 6 100m sprinters! What else is interesting? Robert Esmie *doesn't* train or live in the United States, a fact shared by the remaining athletes (Fredericks earned a CS degree from BYU in Provo, Utah) which was quickly pointed out in NBC's coverage of the World Championships. Blast off indeed – chalk one up for the Canadians!

Alas, poor Bailey: I knew him, Horatio

August 3rd, 1997: the king is dead! Long live the king. Well, dead? I don't think so. More like a minor strain. But the media was quick to dig Bailey's grave for him. The Americans once again captured the sprints. I was surprised the reporters didn't hail Bailey's second place finish as "mediocre": he *only* won the silver! The golden 9.84 was still intact, with Greene missing the target by 0.02s. Was he really that far off the mark, though? Table 4 reveals an awful truth. Greene's 9.86s (+0.2 m/s) corrects to roughly 9.88s, which coincidentally is what a 9.84s with a +0.7 m/s wind becomes! Shall we presume that the Greek god of wind was sitting in our corner on that fateful Sunday in Athens?

What of the other sub-9.90s performances this year, or even for all-time? Table 5 hints that the tail-wind has betrayed Leroy Burrell, King Carl, Boldon, and Fredericks, whose apparent sub-9.90s were all but same. However, Burrell did manage to make it under that barrier, but it wasn't with his then-WR 9.85s (+1.2 m/s) from Lausanne, nor his 9.88s (also +1.2)

from the '91 WCs in Tokyo. Rather, a seemingly average 9.97s into a 1.3 m/s head-wind in the Barcelona '92 semi-finals earned him that spot as a calm 9.89s (a mark which is officially ranked almost 80th on the all-time list!).

And so, Greene takes the lead in the 1997 wind-corrected rankings, albeit by a mere 0.01s over Bailey (who, in all fairness, was a mere 0.01s in front of formidable Boldon's 9.90s in *actual* still-air conditions at Stuttgart – no wind-correction needed!). But all is not lost for the good guys. Upon further inspection of Table 4, one notes that only one name appears twice: Bailey. While Burrell, Fredericks, and Boldon have each legally run sub-9.90s twice, Bailey is the only one who holds that title after all is wind-corrected!

What a race was the 1997 Canadian Championships men's 100m final! If we're to believe the wind-correction figures, it propelled Bailey to be the sole individual to hold two sub-9.90s still-air races, gave Robert Esmie a sub-10s run to tuck under his belt, and put Canada on an even par with the US for number of top 6 sub-10s world-class sprinters.

Would the *real* World's Fastest Man please step forward?

As I write this article, there is just over a month remaining in the 1997 Grand Prix season. Bailey is back in force, stating in a post-relay victory interview with NBC that his "To do" list for the remainder of the season included: break World Record. Two legal 9.91s in the same day while injured and after coming off a virus isn't too shabby!

With Boldon and Greene also pushing their limits, and Fredericks lurking in the shadows, these lists may be out of date by the time they hit the stands. Given the right conditions, it is very likely that we'll see the 9.84 knocked down a couple notches. As to how far, and more importantly, by whom? Currently, almost any of these individuals can claim the title of "World's Fastest Man" by some definition or another. Although Greene holds the World Championship title, and in capturing gold posted the fastest time of the year (both wind-corrected and official), Bailey still retains his WR and has clocked the most sub-9.90s races ever after wind-correction. Meanwhile, Boldon holds the most legal sub-9.90s performances of 1997, and has run the fastest ever 100m/200m one-day combo (9.90/19.77 in Stuttgart). As for Fredericks: he's the current wind-corrected WR holder at 9.84s (Lausanne 1996).

Running at their current seasonal bests, a 9.83s mark can be made by Greene with a +0.8 m/s wind, Bailey with a +1.0, and Boldon with a +1.3

m/s tail boost. Fredericks is currently out of the running with his 9.97s, which would require an illegal +2.4 m/s aid. Of course, their current best efforts may not be their final best efforts for '97, so anything can happen. As of the Zurich GP (13 Aug), Bailey says he's throwing in the towel for '97 due to ongoing injuries – but truth and fiction can sometimes be hard to discern when it comes to his injuries. Word on the track had it that he couldn't even jog down the straight a week prior to the 100m final in Atlanta...

Which one of our contestants holds the key? It'll be most exciting to find out. By the time you read this article (to paraphrase Ed McMahon): "Someone may already be a winner!".

References

- [1] J. R. Mureika, "What really are the best 100m performances?", *Athletics: Canada's National Track and Field / Running Magazine* (July 1997).

Date	Wind-corrected time	Official time and wind	Location
04 May	10.13	(10.13, +0.0)	Rio de Janeiro
08 Jun	10.32	(10.28, +0.6)	Moscow (cold rain)
25 Jun	9.98	(10.07, -1.5)	Paris
02 Jul	10.03	(9.97, +1.0)	Lausanne
19 Jul	9.89	(10.03, -2.1)	Abbotsford
03 Aug	9.93	(9.91, +0.2)	Athens WC
	9.94	(9.91, +0.5)	Athens WC (sf)
13 Aug	10.13	(10.17, -0.7)	Zurich

Table 1: Bailey’s 1997 progression, best per meet (to 13 Aug 1997)

1. Donovan Bailey	9.89	(10.03)
2. Robert Esmie	9.96	(10.10)
3. Bruny Surin	10.01	(10.15)
4. Carleton Chamers	10.13	(10.27)
5. Glenroy Gilbert	10.15	(10.29)
6. O’Brien Gibbons	10.16	(10.30)
7. Troy Dos Santos	10.36	(10.51)
8. Eric Frempong-Manso	10.36	(10.51)

Table 2: 100m final from Abbotsford (wind -2.1 m/s), 19 Jul 1997

1. Maurice Greene	9.88	(9.86, +0.2)	03 Aug 97	Athens WC
2. Donovan Bailey	9.89	(10.03, -2.1)	19 Jul 97	Abbotsford
3. Ato Boldon	9.90	(9.90, +0.0)	13 Jul 97	Stuttgart
4. Tim Montgomery	9.94	(9.92, +0.2)	13 Jun 97	Indianapolis
5. Frank Fredericks	9.94	(9.98, -0.7)	13 Aug 97	Zurich
6. Robert Esmie	9.96	(10.10, -2.1)	19 Jul 97	Abbotsford
7. Jon Drummond	9.97	(9.92, +0.8)	12 Jun 97	Indianapolis

Table 3: 1997 sub-10s World 100m Leaders, wind-corrected (to 13 Aug 1997); best performances per athlete

9.84	Frank Fredericks	(9.86,-0.4)	Lausanne	03 Jul 1996
9.88	Maurice Greene	(9.86, +0.2)	Athens	03 Aug 1997
	Donovan Bailey	(9.84, +0.7)	Atlanta	27 Jul 1996
9.89	Linford Christie	(9.87, +0.3)	Stuttgart	15 Aug 1993
	Bailey	(10.03, -2.1)	Abbotsford	19 Jul 1997
	Leroy Burrell	(9.97, -1.3)	Barcelona	01 Aug 1992

Table 4: All-time wind-corrected Sub-9.90s 100m times (to 13 Aug 1997)

Rank/athlete	Official	wind	becomes
1. Donovan Bailey	9.84	+0.7	9.88
2. Leroy Burrell	9.85	+1.2	9.92
3. Frank Fredericks	9.86	-0.4	9.84
4. Maurice Greene	9.86	+0.2	9.88
5. Carl Lewis	9.86	+1.2	9.93
6. Linford Christie	9.87	+0.3	9.89
7. Ato Boldon	9.87	+1.3	9.95
8. Burrell	9.88	+1.2	9.95
9. Frank Fredericks	9.89	+0.7	9.93
10. Boldon	9.89	+0.8	9.94

Table 5: All-time official Sub-9.90s 100m times and wind-corrected equivalents (to 13 Aug 1997)

Athlete	Official	(reaction)	Corrected
1. Maurice Greene (USA)	9.86	(+0.13)	9.88
2. Donovan Bailey (CAN)	9.91	(+0.14)	9.93
3. Tim Montgomery (USA)	9.94	(+0.13)	9.96
4. Frank Fredericks (NAM)	9.95	(+0.12)	9.97
5. Ato Boldon (TRI)	10.02	(+0.12)	10.04
6. Davidson Ezinwa (NIG)	10.10	(+0.13)	10.12
7. Bruny Surin (CAN)	10.12	(+0.14)	10.14
8. Mike Marsh (USA)	10.29	(+0.14)	10.31

Table 6: 1997 World Championships Men's 100m final; wind= +0.2 m/s